


The 2017 Edinburgh International Book Festival : Brave New Words



'We are living', said Nick Barley, ' in an age of political earthquakes'

The Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival was speaking at the launch of EIBF 2017. It's seventy years since Rudolf Bing and Lord Provost James Falconer co-founded the first Edinburgh Festival; in 1947, just two years after the end of the war, many people thought they were wasting their time. The UK, explains EIBF Chair Allan Little, was bankrupt, there were fuel shortages, housing shortages, floods and a  polio epidemic – surely all of these were more important than an arts festival? Every English city Bing approached turned him down. James Falconer, however, had greater vision. He understood Bing's wish to rebuild a shared heritage, to reignite cross-cultural communication.

'He set the city on this remarkable journey.'

This year's EIBF programme is more international, more inclusive, bolder and braver than ever before. It'll look at truth and post-truth, terrorism and fanaticism, gender, diversity and identity, death and globalisation – but it will also focus on personal stories.

While big names include Paul Auster (*The New York Trilogy*), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*), Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*), Peter Hoeg (a rare chance to see the author of *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*) and Elif Shafak (*The Bastard*

of Istanbul), all of whose works encompass major themes, EIBF also welcomes those who write about the smaller things. ☒ Mark Kydd's performance work about family life *There Were Two Brothers* (right) is 'a funny, personal exploration of fraternal relationships'; Joanna Cannon (*The Trouble with Goats and Sheep*) and Katy Mahood (*Entanglement*, publishing in 2018) focus on chance encounters and small acts of kindness, the important stuff of our everyday lives.

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From *This Woman Can* to *Reading the Final Chapter*, the 2017 festival has eleven strands, covering such diverse topics as comics and graphic novels, the 70th anniversary of India's independence from British rule, Scotland's 'new towns' (no, not that New Town – the Festival has been on its travels to Cumbernauld, Glenrothes, Irvine, Livingston and East Kilbride), and performance poetry (hip-hop with The Last Poets anyone?)

Indeed, performances of all kinds feature large this year; *Scarlatti and Cage with David Greilsammer and David Mitchell* offer 'achingly beautiful piano music by two of history's most inventive composers...together with miniature readings and micro-stories', all taking place in the magnificent setting of St Mary's Cathedral, the Unthanks talk (and sing) about the music and poems of Molly Drake, and in *Phenomenal Women Speak Out*, Jemima Foxtrot, Iona Lee, Sabrina Mahfouz and Sophia Walker perform their work, 'relating to (and not relating to) themes of womanhood.'

Nature writers go from strength to strength, none more so ☒ than Scotland's own Jim Crumley (*Nature's Architect*, *The Eagle's Way*, *The Nature of Autumn*), who introduces his new book *The Nature of Winter*. Jim shares a session with Christopher Nicolson, whose *Among the Summer Snows* describes walking in the Cairngorms in search of the 'beautiful, thought-provoking and enigmatic' white patches. Jim Carruth

and Thomas A Clark read poetry inspired by the Scottish landscape, Sir John Lister-Kaye (founder of the Aigas Field Centre, right) talks about his childhood and Erlend Clouston celebrates the iconic work of Nan Shepherd.

☒ Another genre to join the mainstream in recent years is speculative writing/science fiction; Scottish SF master Ken Macleod is joined by Charles Stross (left), Nalo Hopkinson, Ada Palmer, Jo Walton and Adam Roberts in looking at, amongst other things, what imaginative authors can do when the real world starts to mimic their fictional creations.

Crime writing? Just about every country is producing outstanding writers in this uber-popular area; EIBF will feature top authors from all over Europe and beyond, so whether you like your thrillers grim and grisly (Stuart MacBride, Val McDermid, Mark Billingham...) or cosy (Alexander McCall Smith, who'll make four appearances), there's plenty to satisfy your inner detective here.

Some festivals only pay lip service to young readers; at EIBF they are blessed with the spectacular Baillie Gifford Children's Programme. Director Janet Smyth said:

'Children and young people use fiction as a framework for exploring difficult stories and challenging truths.'

☒ This year's writers investigate life on a council estate (Alex Wheatle *Flying Fergus*), climate change (Barroux *Welcome*), grief (Cat Clarke *Girlhood*, Ade Edmondson *Tilly & the Time Machine*), relationships (the wonderful Patrick Ness's *Release*) and disability (Penny Joelson *I Have No Secrets*) – but it's not all serious! There's lots of fun too, with ☒ authors like Chloe Inkpen (*Hole in the Zoo*) and her dad Mike (*Kipper*) and Emily MacKenzie (*There's Broccoli in My Ice Cream!*) (right) for the very young, plus *Hilarious Histories of Edinburgh* (Macastory), Julian Clary and David

Roberts' *The Bolds on Holiday*, Gillian Cross's *The Demon Headmaster* and Philip Ardagh's *Medieval Mayhem*, for ages 8+.

✘ A strong programme for Young Adults includes Debi Gliori, Darren Shan, Meg Rosoff, Theresa Breslin and William Sutcliffe; a highlight for me will be the always excellent Siobhan Dowd Trust Memorial Lecture, this year given by Cressida Cowell, who will talk about the importance of crafting stories to entertain children. And if your offspring get fed up with sitting still, EIBF can offer them plenty of hands-on activities and fun performances too, starting at 10am every morning with 'a magical trip into the world of words with one of the Festival authors – Nairn's free *Are You Sitting Comfortably?* in the Baillie Gifford Story Box.

Every year EIBF expands its range, but in 2017 it's also ✘ extending its space. Charlotte Square Gardens, traditional home of EIBF's tented village, will still be buzzing with activity, but there will also be two new venues on nearby George Street. The Greenhouse and Bosco Theatre will host lots of extra events, and even have their own Refreshments Hut to keep you going. You'll find cafes, bars and an ice cream trike in Charlotte Square itself – and you're also free to bring in your own picnic, water taps provided.

'What you have done in Edinburgh is one of the most magnificent experiences since the war. Here human relations have been renewed.' (*Bruno Walter, 1947*)

✘ Seventy years of festivals have passed. Humanity is still in turmoil, and 2017 is already proving politically explosive. Now more than ever the arts are needed to reach out across borders, across stereotypes, across genders. across genres – across the world. The Edinburgh International Book Festival welcomes us all.

EIBF runs from 12th to 28th August. Tickets for all events may be purchased online, by phone or in person from 8.30am on

Tuesday 20 June – please check the [EIBF website](#) for details. Brochures are available widely at venues throughout the city, including libraries, bookshops and cafes.

